



LORD LYTTON IN HIS STUDY  
*From a picture by E. M. Ward, R.A., at Knebworth House*

# BULWER LYTTON AS OCCULTIST

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The publishers desire to thank the Earl of Lytton for his kindness in supplying the frontispiece for this book.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

IF one were asked to name the book which more than any other provided a matrix for the building-up of modern theosophical philosophy in the English language, *Zanoni* seems the inevitable choice. Indeed, not only does a glance through the earlier literature published by the Theosophical Society never fail to reveal it as an oft-quoted book, but the advertisement pages show it being sold and translated as a kind of text-book. A readable story which in

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vivid language treated of adepts, occult powers, the Augoeides, initiation, and the occult Brotherhood as living realities, was exactly the kind of preparation which would be tolerable by the English mind. Eliphas Lévi might find acceptance in France by proffering magic as a kind of intellectual diversion; others in Germany might appeal along the line of religious mysticism, but no such serious approach could be countenanced by the self-conscious Islanders. But leave them the loophole of saying, "Of course, it's only a story, a romance," and the romantic adventurer hidden under the prosaic skin of the islander will play with the ideas, perhaps even secretly hug them as truth.

The object of the present study is to gather such biographical details of Lytton—and especially extracts from his letters—as will show the serious occult student in him,

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and provide some background for the oft-repeated statement that he was an "occultist," who differs from the mere student much as a devout priest differs from the occasional churchgoer.

It may be well to add that in these matters the student by much practice sees not only the green ear of the outward fact or the guarded suggestion, but infers the root beneath and the type of soil from which it springs. A little study of the early relations of Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky provides an excellent example. They met as spiritualists, and very gradually, as he became ready, she disclosed to him her real beliefs and her deeper knowledge of things occult. The professional oath of the physician is a less urgent necessity than the professional oath of the occultist. The latter becomes the guardian of more sacred secrets, and if there are drugs which may

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be perverted in the service of vice, there are occult forces which are a hundredfold more dangerous in the hands of the unclean and the ignorant. If that sounds credulous and entirely mythical, you have only to study mesmerism theoretically and then practically for a little to begin to realise that such a statement may not be so imaginative after all.

So that in what he did or wrote, Lytton was bound to observe precautions, and that not alone for the reason suggested by A. P. Sinnett :

“It is not impossible that Lord Lytton had become, through long study of the subject, so permeated with the love of mystery which inheres in the occult mind apparently, that he preferred to throw out his information in a veiled and mystic shape, so that it would be intelligible to readers in sympathy with himself, and would

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blow unnoticed past the commonplace understanding without awakening angry rejection.”<sup>1</sup>

### HIS EARLY LIFE

“Pray, mamma, are you not sometimes overcome by the sense of your own identity?” said eight-year-old Edward Bulwer one day. “My mother looked up at me in amazed alarm. Quoth she, ‘It is high time you should go to school, Teddy.’” And to school young Lytton went, but neither the miseries of school to a sensitive boy, nor later the arduous life of a writer and politician, stopped his pursuit of the knowledge beyond knowledge, and a thirst for the metaphysical.

During those very early years a strong impression had been made on his mind by the story of his ancestor Dr. John Bulwer

<sup>1</sup> *Occult World*, 20.

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(fl. 1654). The boy used to gaze with awe on the portrait of one about whom mysterious stories were told, and when he could read found a strange appeal in the Platonic mysticism and veiled promises of his writings. Dr. Bulwer was supposed to have lived far beyond the allotted span through mystic knowledge, and is the original of Glyndon's ancestor in *Zanoni*.

At Cambridge, to which he went at the age of nineteen, one of his intimates was Chauncey Hare Townshend, who became one of the leading English students of mesmerism. "He impressed me," says Lytton, "with the idea of a being singularly calm and pure. In spite of a beauty of face, which at that time attracted the admiration of all who even passed him in the streets, his manners and converse were characterised by an almost feminine modesty. He used to say, smiling, that he did not

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believe he was susceptible to love. Withal, he had a pervading sense of his own existence. With an egotism not uncommon to young poets, he thought, wrote, and talked of himself."

It was after breaking down in a speech at the University Union that Lytton revealed a trait thoroughly characteristic of the occultist. Writing of his failure he says: "So much the better. Failure with me has always preceded resolution to succeed."

At this time too he was intensely interested in the Arthurian legends, and there is no doubt but that his talks with Tennyson about constructing a modern epic from them planted the seed which flowered as *The Idylls of the King*.

During a vacation he rambled northward into Scotland, visiting the celebrated Robert Owen in his community. He went over the schools with Owen and was very

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favourably impressed by them and by the high intelligence of the pupils. He says: "The children looked so clean and so happy! I stood by his side observing them, with the tears starting from my eyes. Involuntarily I pressed the hand of the kind enthusiast and began to think he was here, in good earnest, laying the foundations of a system in which evil passions might be stifled from childhood, and serene intelligence govern the human race without King, Lords, or Commons."

On the homeward journey he fell in with gipsies and stayed with them some days. The fortune read from his palm by a young gipsy maiden was a strangely interesting and accurate forecast according to his own record of it. She told him the "new star" (Uranus) thwarted him much, and when he asked her what that star was, she replied:

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"I don't know what they call it. But it makes men fond of strange studies, and brings about crosses and sorrows that you never think to have."

And so it was: throughout his life, inner and outer, runs a characteristic Uranian element of strange and sudden trouble and a craving for complete solitude. "All my life through," he remarks, "I have found the necessity of intervals of complete solitude for the cure of the morbid symptoms which half-solitude engenders."

The next scene where we catch glimpses of the young occultist is in Paris during his first visit to the Continent (1825). He lived a curious double existence there, certainly curious in an aristocratic young man of twenty-two. Part of his time he spent in the whirl of Parisian society. But he had also a retreat at Versailles where he fought with terrific attacks of melancholy in com-



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plete seclusion. Sometimes he rode many hours a day to gain the healthy physical fatigue which would ensure sound sleep. He was writing and studying as well; it was there he wrote a poetical horoscope of a Miss Cunningham which he signed "Magus." In a letter at this time he says: "Talking of resurrection, my course of thought and reading have led me lately thro' some of the less generally known parts of metaphysics." The outer cover for this study and seclusion was the preparation for publication of a volume of poems.

Something of the melancholy that attacked him seems to show itself much later in his occult stories, probably because outlines and sketches for these were begun quite early. There is often a funereal sadness about his efforts at obtaining an occult atmosphere, although they are far finer

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than the crude charnel-house treatment used by his acquaintance Harrison Ainsworth, who revels in coffins, dead men's hands, and all the ghastly paraphernalia of witchcraft.



## CHAPTER II

### TRIALS DESCEND UPON THE ASPIRANT

As soon as Lytton returned to England from Paris after this intensification of his inner life, he began to contact the persons and the circumstances that were to bring upon him his outer battles ; destiny claimed him. His mother was instrumental in fixing his attention on young Rosina Wheeler, but disapproved of a quickly formed attachment for her. After their marriage (1827), Lytton found himself estranged from his mother. denied pecuniary assistance, and forced to begin a fierce drudgery at articles for the magazines to keep his home going. In three years he had won himself reputation and an assured income, but his health was

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undermined, enmity was springing up between him and his wife, and although his mother now would have helped, it was too late to avert tragedy.

We are not concerned with this side of his life : still we must note in passing that Mrs. Bulwer eventually became his bitter enemy, spending her later years in terrible public attacks upon him. It seems ever the case that those who aspire to the heights are tried and stabbed to the quick in the most sensitive region of their natures. Bacon was accused of dishonesty ; Sir Thomas More, who lived intensely in his family life, forced to plunge them in sorrow through what seemed mere obstinacy ; Madame Blavatsky was branded a charlatan ; and Lytton outraged in his delicate sense of reticence and chivalry.

But there was first a period of peaceful industry. A year after his marriage he

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writes from Woodcot House, Oxfordshire :  
"But what better can you expect from a hermit who sees less of the living than the Egyptian sorcerer saw of the dead ; that is to say, one a month ?" During the subsequent years of strenuous writing to make ends meet—for they were both extravagant—there is no outward sign of his occult life, except for a flash of illumination here and there in his articles.

After the separation from his wife we find him writing in a letter to her (1834) : "I ask no forgiveness from Human Being, Such as I am, I will be to the last, my own Judge. I have been my own accuser and my own punishment."

## OCCULT STUDIES

Next year he was diligently working through all the mediæval writers upon astrology and the occult sciences. Whether

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he came in touch with certain Personages of the adept fraternity during his brief visit to Rome and Naples in 1833 it is impossible to say, but from this time his knowledge of the superphysical has an obvious mark of first-hand experience. He enjoyed himself, however, among the old books, and writes quaintly to Forster :

"I know by experience that those wizard old books are full of holes and pitfalls. I myself once fell into one and remained there 45 days and three hours without food, crying for help as loud as I could, but nobody came. You may believe that or not just as you please, but it's true !"

His conclusions from these studies we learn from a letter written some years after. Astrology and the various forms of divination leave him dubious, although they prove that there are "wonderful phenomena in

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our being all unknown to existing philosophy," and he sums up thus :

"I incline to believe that the future is not pre-decreed to individuals, and that is why it cannot be ascertained ; that it varies from week to week according to the change of circumstance and our own conduct, Providence working out the same grand results, no matter what we do, how we prosper or how we suffer."

And yet he seems to have believed, with experimental justification, that the main tendency of a career could be predicted, as we shall see in the case of his famous prognostication about Disraeli.

### THE GENESIS OF "ZANONI"

Such studies were bound to find expression sooner or later in his work, and the publication of *Zicci* (1838), the unfinished sketch of the story later expanded and printed

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under the title of *Zanoni*, is usually regarded as the first token of this intellectual occupation. More detailed study reveals the famous romance as embodying something in Lytton that he had been fervently nourishing from boyhood, namely, an interest in adepts and the occult. Most of his biographers write as if his mind swung in a new direction when he began to publish romances of the supernatural (as it was then called) : actually this was not so. He wrote because the time had come when he knew and could teach, having outgrown his pupilage.

Now we are told that *Zicci* and *A Strange Story* were both inspired by dreams. It seems likely that they were based rather upon what we should now call "astral experiences" beginning in early youth, for it has escaped general notice that in a footnote to *The Tale of Kosem Kesamim, the Magician*, Lytton says : " This tale, complete

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in itself, is extracted from an unfinished romance which, however, furnished the groundwork for *Zanoni*. I may add that I find the outline of this tale in some papers written in my school-days."

*Kosem Kesamim* is important. If it was sketched out in his school-days, then Lytton was indubitably a born occultist, for it contains many ideas inaccessible to a boy except by innate occult knowledge. And we gather from it, too, that he was closely linked by temperament or experience in former incarnations—according to one's taste—with the ancient Chaldean school of occultism.

"The Narrator," he tells us, "is supposed to have been with the Magician amidst the caverns of the interior of the earth," which are lit by "witch-fires and meteors." They come out into a cave on the sea-coast—the Magician's native shore in a long-past

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age. This mysterious being relates how "along the shores which for thirty centuries no human foot has trod, and upon plains where now not one stone stands upon another, telling even of decay—was once the city and the empire of the Wise Kings." That this was not Egypt is shown by the introduction of an Egyptian sage who is an exile. The race had star-read priests:—

"They consulted the stars, but it was to measure the dooms of earth; and could we recall from the dust their perished scrolls, you would behold the mirror of the living times. Their prophecies, wrung from the toil and rapture of those powers which ye suffer to sleep quenched within the soul, traversed the wilds of ages, and pointed out among savage hordes the cities and laws of empires yet to be."

In this story we find also a description of

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a Living Fire or Principle of the Earth which looks remarkably like the source of a similar idea in some of Rider Haggard's romances.

## CHAPTER III

### LYTTON A ROSICRUCIAN

IN the best editions of *Zanoni*, there is prefixed an introduction which accounts for the story by means of a supposed Rosicrucian MS. which the author got from a curious old gentleman he met in a second-hand bookseller's in Covent Garden. This is, of course, a mere literary device, although Bulwer has left it on record that "Denby, the old magic bookseller, was a reality. He is dead." But there is a hint here, for our author was himself a Rosicrucian.

What this means we can appreciate only after considering one or two extant references to the fact by Lytton himself, and also a statement by a modern occultist. For

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there are doubtless many secret organisations using the name and symbolism of the Rosy-Cross which are purely ceremonial and masonic in character, and have no pretensions to being custodians of occult tradition.

Madame Blavatsky stated that, "strictly speaking, the Rosicrucians do not now even exist, the last of that fraternity having departed in the person of Cagliostro." Yet a vital branch of the original mystic brotherhood is said to have been founded in England by Francis Bacon. So say the modern occultists and exoteric students of Baconian persuasion like Mr. Parker Woodward and Mr. Wigston.

The proposition is, then, that Lytton belonged to a Rosicrucian Order whose brothers were in possession of theosophical and occult knowledge, and claimed a sort of apostolic succession *via* Bacon from the

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adepts initiated by the German Ritter Christian Rosencranz.

First we have a statement by Bp. J. I. Wedgwood. Referring to Francis Bacon's Rosicrucian Order, he says: "This did not wholly perish even in the physical world, and the author of *Zanoni* was later among its initiates" (*The Vahan*, May 1, 1912, p. 205).

For the evidence from Lytton himself we are indebted to the excellent biography by his grandson. No papers relating to this secret society were left by Lytton, which, as the second Earl<sup>1</sup> remarks, is not surprising. The latter, however, states authoritatively that his grandfather was "a member of the Society of Rosicrucians and Grand Patron of the Order," and he prints an important letter received by Hargrave

<sup>1</sup> Bulwer was Baron Lytton, his son being the first Earl.

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Jennings from Lytton in acknowledgment of a copy of Jennings' well-known work on the Rosicrucians. The letter is dated 1870 and speaks in high terms of the book. Lytton says that the Rosicrucian Brotherhood is "a Society still existing, but not under any name by which it can be recognised by those without its pale." Then follows a remarkable sentence :

"Some time ago a sect pretending to style itself 'Rosicrucians,' and arrogating full knowledge of the mysteries of the craft, communicated with me, and in reply I sent them the cipher sign of the 'Initiate'—not one of them could construe it."

Here was the source of the vivid descriptions of elemental essence and elemental beings in *Zanoni*; here the tradition he drew upon for his understanding of symbolism. Listen, for example, to Margrave in *A Strange Story* :—

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"The pentacle itself has an intelligible meaning, it belongs to the only universal language, the language of symbol, in which all races that think—around, and above and below us—can establish communion of thought. If in the external universe any one constructive principle can be detected, it is the geometrical; and in every part of the world in which magic pretends to a written character, I find that its hieroglyphics are geometrical."

## THE DISRAELI PREDICTION

Although profoundly interested in the metaphysical problems of man and his relation to the universe, Lytton was at the same time a keen experimentalist. We have seen that he was at pains to sift the writings of the mediæval writers on the occult sciences, and many of their systems of divination he seems to have "tried out"



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for himself. He adopted as his favourite method the mediæval form of geomancy (which is capable of being combined with a certain amount of astrology) and practised it for many years for his own private satisfaction. It is a pity that out of all his readings of geomantic figures only one has survived, but it is a striking and celebrated case—the prediction of the career of Benjamin Disraeli.

The figure and reading published by his son in 1883 is dated "Wildbad, 1860." At this date Disraeli was already a distinguished political personage. Lytton's prescience was far more acute, for he writes in a letter dated April 10, 1846:

"I am so pleased to see his progress in the House, which I alone predicted, the night of his first failure."

He is referring to that dramatic night in 1837 when Disraeli, in his first speech, was

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shouted down and derided, and the future Prime Minister burst out passionately: "I will sit down now, but the time will come when you will hear me." The writer is inclined to think from the internal evidence of the reading that it was mainly written in 1837 actually, and that the 1860 date is merely the date of a fair copy made at that time. There is, for instance, the reference to financial gain by marriage (it was so): since that took place in 1839, it would be out of place as a *prediction* in 1860.

The reading<sup>1</sup> is as follows: "A singularly fortunate figure. A strongly marked influence towards the acquisition of coveted objects. He would gain largely by marriage in the pecuniary sense, which makes a crisis in his life. He would have a peaceful

<sup>1</sup> The figure is in *Life, Letters, etc.*, by his son, vol. 2, p. 328, and its construction and interpretation will be got from Dr. F. Hartmann's *Geomancy*.

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hearth, to his own taste, and leaving him free for ambitious objects.

"In honours, he has not only luck but a felicity far beyond the most favourable prospects that could be reasonably anticipated from his past career, his present position or his personal endowments. He will leave a higher name than I should say his intellect quite warrants, or than would now be conjectured. He will certainly have *very high* honours. Whether official or in rank, high as compared with his birth or actual achievements.

"He has a temperament that finds pleasure in what belongs to social life. He has considerable veneration and will keep well with Church and State. Not merely from policy, but from sentiment and instinct. His illnesses will be few and quick. But his last illness may be lingering. He is likely to live to old age—the close of his career

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much honoured. He will be to the last largely before the public. Much feared by his opponents, but greatly beloved, not only by those immediately about him, but by large numbers of persons to whom he is personally unknown. He will die, whether in or out of office, in an exceptionally high position, greatly lamented, and surrounded to the end by all the magnificent planetary influences of a propitious Jupiter.

"No figure I have drawn more surprises me than this. It is so completely opposed to what I myself should have augured, not only from the rest of his career, but from my knowledge of the man.

"He will bequeath a repute out of all proportion to the opinion now entertained of his intellect even by those who think most highly of it. Greater honours far than he has yet acquired are in store for

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him. His enemies, though active, are not persevering. His official friends, though not ardent, will yet minister to his success."

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH IN PSYCHISM

THERE is plenty of evidence that Lytton's experimental efforts were not confined to either geomancy or divination in general. Probably there was no branch of psychic research into which he had not looked at one time or another. His friend Townshend had introduced him to Dr. Elliotson, the physician who was bitterly attacked for his use and defence of mesmerism, and we may be sure that Lytton saw many of his experiments.

About the year 1853 Lytton devoted a great deal of attention to spiritualism. Published letters show that he was an unprejudiced and careful observer. Since,

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however, he is writing to individuals who were not occult enthusiasts, he is cautious in his expressions; yet we detect hints which suggest that he was by no means at sea in the matter. Rather the likelihood is that he was engaged in definitely encouraging serious research, and trying to guard investigators from seeing discarnate human beings as the only possible agents, once the phenomena were admitted as genuine. He tells Forster (1861):

"These marvels . . . have been abandoned for the most part to persons who know little of philosophy or metaphysics, and remain insoluble. I wish to make philosophers inquire into them as I think Bacon, Newton and Davy would have inquired."

In several letters he takes pains to set afloat the conception that elemental beings and nature spirits are largely concerned in the production of the phenomena. A

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typical example is in a letter to Lady Combermere (1854):

"There may be intermediate beings of mixed nature, not deliberately evil nor steadily benevolent—capricious, uncertain, and only able to get at imperfect *rapproch* with humanity. They may amuse themselves with taking feigned names and sporting with mortal credulity, and be delusive and erring prompters without any settled motive. . . . They may be very injurious to ordinary understandings, and very disappointing to the highest. Nevertheless, I think where they would appear to persons of powerful and moral courage, resolved calmly to investigate their nature and disregard all their promptings, they would be subjected to a control little dreamed of at present."

He notes also the transference of knowledge from the mind of the sitter, remarking to his son: "I doubt much whether all be

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more than some strange clairvoyance passing from one human brain to another, or if spirits, something analogous to fairies or genii." One cannot but wish that the notebook of his researches were available, even if only in selections. He himself says of it, "It will be curious."

Haunted houses figured in his observations. At his own Knebworth there was always a thrill to follow for the guest after the glow of welcome by a kind host. In the hall was the splendid inscription:—

Read the rede of this old roof-tree,  
Here be trust fast, opinion free,  
Knightly right hand, Christian knce,  
Worth in all, wit in some,  
Laughter open, slander dumb.  
Hearth, where rooted friendships grow,  
Safe as altar e'en to foe,  
And ye sparks that upward go  
When the hearth flame dies below.  
If thy sap in these may be,  
Fear no winter—old roof-tree.

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But one of the bedrooms was haunted by an apparition called the Yellow Boy, and it is said guests were usually put in this room on the night of their arrival as an experiment. Frith, the artist, is credited with the story that Lord Castlereagh, at breakfast on the morning following his first night there, described the Yellow Boy whom he had seen. Lytton listened with acute interest to his description of how the ghostly figure drew its fingers three times across its throat and vanished, but did not tell Castlereagh that the ghost always appeared to those destined to die a violent death. The difficulty about the story is that Lytton was only nineteen when Castlereagh committed suicide, and was little at Knebworth up to that time.

The celebrated story of "The Haunted and the Haunters," which Lytton published in *Blackwood's* for August, 1859, was based

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in part on his impressions of a haunted house in Berkeley Square. In this case the haunting (according to one account) was due to the magical labours of an old lady who lived in the house for many years—the lady mentioned by Eliphas Lévi as having asked his assistance.

### LYTTON AND ELIPHAS LÉVI

Eliphas Lévi came to London in 1853, and it has been stated rather recklessly (by Mr. Sax Rohmer) that Lytton was a pupil of the French Kabbalist. Mr. A. E. Waite made inquiries into the contact between Lévi and Lord Lytton and elicited the fact that the only letter from Lévi among Lytton's papers "would appear to be addressed either to a stranger or to a very distant acquaintance," but adds that the letter "makes mention of an evocation of elementary spirits performed on the top

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of the London Pantheon," at which the author of *Zanoni* assisted. It is true that phrases employed by Lytton in his description of the *Vril*<sup>1</sup> force (used by the people of his romance of *The Coming Race*) distinctly recall Lévi's teaching about the universal force of the Astral Light, and no doubt Bulwer was familiar with these writings. Still, he seems to have had in mind something which he knew at first hand: "I did not mean Vril for mesmerism, but for electricity, developed into uses as yet only dimly guessed, and including whatever there may be genuine in mesmerism, which I hold to be a mere branch current of the one great fluid pervading all nature" (Letter to Forster, 1870).

Following up this idea, he even attempted unsuccessfully to devise a kind of wireless

<sup>1</sup> Supposed to be contracted from *virile*, "male potency."

telegraphy. He seems to have started from the mediæval notion of magnetic sympathies, and hoped to construct a set of two magnetic needles in such tune that when one was moved the other would respond at any distance. He employed a Holborn optician to make the apparatus for him, but, according to "E. H. J.," who tells the story, some mistake was made about the necessary astrological conditions and the experiment failed.

## CLAIRVOYANCE

We have seen that he often spoke guardedly of things occult, occasionally quite definitely—as when he tells Forster "I do believe in the substance of what used to be called Magic, that is, I believe that there are persons of a peculiar temperament who can effect very extraordinary things not accounted for satisfactorily by any existent philosophy." A further and tenta-

tive suggestion might be made that in unsuspected places he reveals a personal familiarity with clairvoyant observation, but that he most carefully hid this faculty even from his intimate friends. He has an essay on "The Normal Clairvoyance of the Imagination," in which he points out that an author may "see through other organs than the eyes; describe with an accuracy that astounds a native the lands which he has never beheld; and read the most secret thoughts in the hearts of men who lived a thousand years ago." And referring to his own case he says: "I am not sure, indeed, that I could not describe the things I imagine more exactly than the things I habitually see. I am not sure that I could not give a more truthful picture of the Nile, which I have never beheld except in my dreams, than I could of the little lake at the bottom of my own park."



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A still more striking instance occurs in a reference to genius, where the "rings" and "tints" strongly suggest clairvoyance. The passage runs: "I have a general notion that every original genius stands within his own magic circle, that no one else ever drew a magic circle exactly like it, that one finds on trying to institute a rival comparison between circle A and circle B, that the magicians baffle one, and immediately begin shifting the tints and outlines of the rings that gird them, so that where one moment we detect a similitude, in the next we are startled by a contrast" (Letter to Mrs. Cosway, 1870).

## VIEWS ON RELIGION

Religious and theological questions did not interest Lytton to any extent. He was religious by nature and found help in religious exercises, but his acute imaginative

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faculty saw through the folly of busying oneself about forms of worship or theological tenets. He puts his attitude succinctly in a letter to his son (1862): "I accept the Church to which I belong, because I think it immaterial to me here and hereafter whether some of its tenets are illogical or unsound, and because, before I could decide that question, I must wade thro' an immense mass of learning for which I have no time, and then go thro' a process of reasoning, for which I have no talent. And when I have done all this, *cui bono?* . . . It is not my *métier*."

At an early period he had spent much time in studying arguments for the existence of something in man which persists after death, and in another (very lengthy) letter he discusses life after death and the existence of the soul. Some of his remarks on the latter are striking to the modern reincar-

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nationist, who believes that the personal mind dies in due course after each life. Lytton thought that "in truth soul really means the living principle. And the mistake to my mind of metaphysicians has been to confine it to the thinking faculty or mind. Now, I am not quite sure that the mind which we now have necessarily lives again with the soul" (1861).

One more passage will serve to show how shrewdly he had estimated the defect of his own church, and how sympathetically he could admire the results of other types of faith. He had been reading the life of St. Francis of Sales—"That R.C. faith, between you and me, does produce very fine specimens of adorned humanity—once so sweet and so heroical. I suspect the Brahminical faith does the same. Both agree on this—the desire to keep before them, and melt into, a diviner essence than the human. And,

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therefore, both are at once more human and more divine. We members of the Protestant Established Church are always bringing Heaven into our parlour, and trying to pare religion into common sense" (1870).

## CHAPTER V

### PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

No account of Bulwer, even as an occultist, would be adequate without some sketch of his personal characteristics, for his was a very striking and decided personality. Although his manner was kindness itself, there was a tremendous air of dignity and power about him—"an aristocratic something bordering on hauteur." Even when a young man just climbing to literary fame, he impressed one writer to record that he never saw Lytton without being reminded of the passage, "Stand back! I am holier than thou!" Leslie Ward, who drew his portrait, has given us also a word-picture of his appearance. He "had a remarkably

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narrow face with a high forehead; his nose was piercingly aquiline and seemed to swoop down between his closely set blue eyes, which changed in expression as his interest waxed and waned. When he was interestedly questioning his neighbour, he became almost satanic looking, and his glance grew so keenly inquisitive as to give the appearance of a 'cast' in his eyes. Carefully curled hair crowned his forehead, and his bushy eyebrows, beard and moustache gave a curious expression to his face, which was rather pale, except in the evening, when he slightly 'touched up,' as the dandies of his day were in the habit of doing." A lady who visited Knebworth in 1858 notes his "fine intellectual forehead. The veins often became plain in it. . . . He had a slender hand like an Eastern's."

His care about dress and personal appearance was the subject of ridicule during his

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lifetime and afterwards. It is not so long since a writer in a weekly journal found fault with Lytton's (to him) over-meticulousness in the matter of clean shirts—surely a blameless peculiarity. To the unprejudiced reader to-day, the figure which appears is that of a punctilious and courtly aristocrat, working with iron determination through ill-health and personal trouble, appearing to his guests "haggard in the morning, and in the evening, radiant debonair middle age"—listening deferentially to the humblest and most obscure member of the party, and anon, putting aside his long oriental pipe with its Turkish tobacco, to hold the attention of the whole room with his softly spoken sentences, packed with knowledge and lit with flashes of imaginative insight.

Leslie Ward tells us that Lytton had little artistic sense with regard to painting and sculpture, yet he certainly had a

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nervous organisation as sensitive as any artist's. As a young man he remarked that when he fixed his attention on the sea or sky, they affected him powerfully but differently. The sea troubled him, while the sky brought repose. Contemplating the sky he says: "My soul seems to wander through serener avenues of thought towards that everlasting, limitless, unattainable repose which is the spiritual realm of a Divine Presence." It was this sensitiveness to outward conditions, no doubt, which was responsible for one of his peculiarities, that of multiplying the number of houses or rooms which he either rented or owned. He would take a fancy to a house somewhere, would rent it, and then shut himself up in it for weeks, writing busily.

He had some apprehension of burial alive, a topic of which he used to speak

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at times, chilling his listeners with gruesome stories. After his death his will was found to contain provisions safeguarding him from such a possibility.

## LYTTON THE INITIATE

We have been gleaning what evidence we could of the thoughts and researches of one who—to borrow his own phrases—had studied the occult and mysterious “from the Chaldee and the Mage, from the Pythian of Greece and the Saga of northern terror down to Yankee spirit-rappers and hysterical Clairvoyants.” What are we to conclude as to his position in the occult world? Was he a mere student of books and looker-on at phenomena, or had he achieved some degree of spiritual illumination? There is the evidence of fact and inference from fact, and, secondly, the testimony of authority.

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Reviewing the evidence, we find him holding independent views on the phenomena of spiritualism and a tolerant conformity in religion; practising divination successfully, and attributing several of his most notable occult stories to “dream” experiences; also belonging to a Rosicrucian fraternity. These facts in themselves prove nothing except that he was a remarkable and mystically inclined author of distinction. But add to these powerful and successful versatility of talent duly put to use, and certain moral aspirations and qualities typical of the true occultist—and we come to the conclusion that we are dealing with an individual sufficiently big, sufficiently rounded in his development, for us to hazard a guess that he was an Initiate.

A consideration of the versatility of Lytton has been outside our scope. To get a true sense of his significance in the

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world of his time, we have to remember his activity as a Member of Parliament and his Colonial Secretaryship. His wise outlook on war, on colonisation, we can learn from his speeches. We must remember how, in spite of his deafness, he achieved oratorical triumphs in the House. We have to keep in mind his efforts for a free Press, and especially we must read his speech which dealt the death-blow to that thinly veiled continuation of slavery known as Negro Apprenticeship. We find his influence affecting English thought and manners in unexpected directions. We see him encouraging new forms of medical treatment, helping by his brilliantly written witness to the water-cure to dispel the stagnation of British medical methods. We investigate the history of the modern man's black dress coat, and lo! it comes from his *Pelham*!

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The moral qualities and aspirations are worth while illustrating. Of course, there is no contention that Lytton was irreproachable, but he had in full measure qualities which are not sufficiently recognised by many of his biographers. The general reader is most unfairly provided with a conception of an industrious but dandified intellectual gentleman with little manhood, who loomed fairly large in his own day, but has now shrunk to rather insignificant proportions.

Take first the young man at Versailles in 1826. Those who are acquainted with *Light on the Path* or *The Voice of the Silence* will see an enthusiast anticipating the advice given therein:—

“When I perceive in myself the growth of any passion that promises to be real, I do not rest till I have destroyed it to the very root. Once only, of late, I have

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been in danger" (Letter to Mrs. Cunningham).

But the witness-in-chief is his son Robert:—

"No man since Goethe ever laboured so incessantly at the improvement and completion of his own intellectual, moral, and even physical being all round. But between him and Goethe there was this essential difference: in my father's temperament the incentive to self-improvement was always an intense desire to be instrumental in the improvement of his fellow-creatures . . . He could not think or feel without reference to the thoughts and feelings of those around him . . . praise for any kind of moral goodness, the ready recognition of a generous motive or lofty principle of his conduct, would almost overpower him; and I have frequently seen it bring the tears to his eyes. Similarly,

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he writhed under calumny or any misinterpretation of his moral character. 'It is more than injustice,' he once exclaimed; 'it is ingratitude. Men calumniate me, and I would lay down my life to serve them.'"

Before passing on, it may be wise to add that his practical exertions on behalf of, and kindness to, others are easily established facts.

## LYTTON AND THE EASTERN ADEPTS

We come now to the "testimony of authority" regarding his occult status.

Madame Blavatsky wrote in *Isis Unveiled* that no author ever gave a more truthful or more poetical description of elemental beings than Sir E. Bulwer Lytton. Later, in *The Theosophist* for October, 1884 (vol. 6, p. 17), she spoke of him as "one who is still claimed by the mysterious brotherhood in India as a member of their own body,



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although he never avowed his connection with them."

Andrew Lang, writing on "Saint-Germain the Deathless," asks, "Was he known to Lord Lytton about 1860? Was he then Major Fraser?" Then, omitting Bishop Wedgwood's Bacon-Rosicrucian statement already quoted, we have Dr. Weller Van Hook, who, in writing of the activities of the great Adept known as the Venetian, describes him as heading the Atlantean occult tradition and having amongst his pupils the Master Rakovsky (Comte de Saint-Germain) and "the Master who was Lord Lytton" (*Theosophist*, xliv, 399).

Dr. Besant, writing in the next number of the same magazine on her colleague, C. W. Leadbeater, says: "In his parents' home when he was a child he saw the great Occultist, Bulwer Lytton, and he remembers seeing a letter, lying on a table, drop to the

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ground and flutter along it to his hand, untouched by aught visible." This suggestion that Lytton had actual magical powers recalls the stories current in his lifetime that he could make himself invisible at will.

We see, then, that to deduce from our estimate of Lytton's occult knowledge and work for the world that he was an Initiate is a modest hypothesis alongside the statements of certain modern occultists. Where precisely he stood—on what rung of the ladder—in the Occult Brotherhood is no business of ours: it is enough for us to know that he belonged to those pledged to the service of the race for all time to come. And contact with such rare souls is not easily forgotten. Striving to serve the One Life, something more of its sunlight and vivifying powers pours through them upon all they meet. It was in no spirit

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of vanity that our Old Wizard (Vieux Sorcier), as he called himself, wrote this farewell to a young friend, a farewell we may make our own :—

“I believe that you will remember your visit to the Vieux Sorcier more than six months—memories of that sort are not included in the category to which six months is the limit. You will remember it when the grass will be round his grave, and children, perhaps grandchildren, round your own knee. And when they ask you what manner of man was the Vieux Sorcier, I doubt not that you will say a kind word for him. And in that belief I dismiss you gratefully to turn harebells into silver and gaze on the dance of fairies.”

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I

AN unexpected light is thrown on Lytton's secret occult activities by a passage in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, edited by A. T. Barker (Lond., 1923). The reference to the evocation on the top of the Pantheon (*ante* p. 36) is now seen to be one incident in the history of an attempt to found an occult school. In a letter to A. O. Hume in 1881, Mahatma K.H. writes :—

“But a ‘hot-bed of magick’ we never dreamt of. Such an organisation as mapped out by Mr. Sinnett and yourself is unthinkable among Europeans ; and it has become next to impossible even in India—unless you are prepared to climb to a height of 18,000 to 20,000 amidst the glaciers of the Himalayas. The greatest as well as the most promising of such schools in Europe, the last attempt in this direction—failed most signally some twenty years ago in London. It was the secret school

## APPENDIX I

for the practical teaching of magick founded under the name of a club by a dozen of enthusiasts under the leadership of Lord Lytton's father. He had collected together for the purpose the most ardent and enterprising as well as some of the most advanced scholars in mesmerism and "ceremonial magic," such as Eliphas Lévi, Regazzoni, and the Kopt Zergvan Bey. And yet in the pestilent London atmosphere the 'Club' came to an untimely end. I visited it about half a dozen times, and perceived from the first that there was and could be nothing in it" (pp. 209-210).

## APPENDIX II

THE following brief list may save time and trouble for those who wish to study Lord Lytton at first hand—it has no other pretension.

The best biography, without which the foregoing sketch could not have been written, is:—*The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton*, by his Grandson, the Earl of Lytton, 2 vols. (Macmillan), London, 1913.

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### SOME WRITINGS OF BULWER LYTTON OF OCCULT INTEREST

*Arasmanes, or the Seeker.*

*The Coming Race.*

*A Dream of the Dead* (signed "Hermides"), in  
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*The Haunted and the Haunters, or The House and the  
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of Lytton.

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*The Pilgrims of the Rhine.*

*A Strange Story.*

*The Tale of Kosem Kesamim, the Magician*, in Lytton's  
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Lond., 1868.

*Zanoni.*

*Zicci.*

*Note.*—A list of Lytton's writings in order of  
publication, with dates, will be found at pages  
527-529 of the second volume of the biography  
recommended at the beginning of this Appendix.